

11. QUALITY HUNT PROGRAMS – BRIEFING

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"GREEN SHEET"

Meeting: April 11-12, 2008
Agenda Item 11: Quality Hunt Programs – **Briefing**
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Background:

This briefing is in response to an August 3-4, 2007 Fish and Wildlife Commission request to the Department regarding funding of quality hunt programs. Expanding the hunter access programs managed by the Department has been a priority for several years. The hunting public identified expansion as a priority during development of the 2003-09 Game Management Plan to better address access to industrial timberlands, waterfowl, and pheasant hunting. Opinion surveys conducted since that time continue to identify lack of access as a critical component of recruiting and retaining hunters.

Efforts to develop funding mechanisms to expand the access program have been challenging and in fact, a Federal mitigation contract for over \$300,000 per year ended last year. These funds supported three private lands biologists working on hunter access and habitat enhancement in southeast Washington. Fortunately an increase in Federal funds known as the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act became available and was used by the Department to maintain the access and habitat enhancement program in this area.

A new funding proposal was developed in concert with hunting organizations to expand the current program. The proposal was originally submitted to the Washington State Legislature in 2004. The basis of the recommendation was a five-dollar surcharge on all hunting licenses. The proposal, with some modifications, was proposed for three consecutive years to the Legislature without success. The Department modified the proposal in 2007 to only affect the small game license with the funding to be dedicated to small game hunting access. This proposal was not supported by the Governor's office and was not forwarded to the 2008 Legislature.

In the meantime, hunter access issues have demanded the Department's attention in other areas of the state. The snow goose quality hunting program on Fir Island and the Mt Saint Helen's elk hunting access on Weyerhaeuser industrial timberlands are two examples. Both of these new hunter access efforts were accomplished through re-prioritizing the work of existing staff and resources.

Discussions with stakeholders on alternate ways to fund an expanded program have resulted in many suggestions. The most viable appear to be:

- Modification of the deer and elk permit application process
- Potential federal farm bill legislation
- Increased use of Pittman –Robertson funding as it becomes available
- Allocation of potential increased hunting license fees

These options will be discussed during the briefing planned for the April 11-12, 2008 Fish and Wildlife Commission meeting.

Policy Issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

Determine a funding mechanism to expand hunter access for quality hunting opportunities.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

The issue of expanding hunter access programs has received extensive public involvement with hunting organizations, stakeholders groups, and general hunters. Workshops and public meetings were conducted, stakeholder recommendations were developed, and legislation was drafted. The results include: a new Commission policy; a new Landowner Hunting Permit program; a review and revision of current hunter access program implementation; a web based mapping application called GoHunt; and recent work on a hunting reservation system. The one shortfall of this extensive effort to date is a significant funding mechanism.

Action requested (identify the specific Commission decisions you are seeking):

Guidance and support for Department efforts to seek additional funding. This is a Commission request from the August 3-4, 2007 Commission meeting.

Draft motion language:

Briefing only.

Justification for Commission action:

To provide greater access to private lands for hunting with a focus on special "quality" opportunities. The goals are to improve the recruitment and retention of hunters, improve hunter/landowner relations, address game population and harvest objectives, and help alleviate wildlife conflict situations.
